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ABSTRACT

Academic achievement can be set in a stage of humanistic pupil-teacher relationships. However, humanization is not an easy task, and success may be achieved only by dedication and direction. The first step in this process is the definition of the goal. Humanization is defined in the following manner: (1) Children should enjoy school, want to attend school, and think it's a good place to be; and (2) Students must be treated with respect and dignity as individuals. A statement and definition of goals does not automatically insure success in achieving an attitudinal change in the professional staff. A change in conditions might encourage a change in the way teachers view their pupils. There are five conditions to implementation of this plan: (1) small-group instruction; (2) two-person team teaching; (3) carpeting in classrooms; (4) open space; and (5) parent involvement. The school principal must understand the needs of the teachers as well as those of the student. He must be certain to exercise leadership in a humanistic fashion. (Author/AJL)

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HUMANIZING TEACHER-PUPIL RELATIONSHIPS

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Humanizing is a term which is frequently misunderstood. It is often associated with a permissive, child-dominated atmosphere, an atmosphere which sacrifices concern for intellectual development. Nothing can be further from the truth. Academic achievement can be set in a stage of humanistic pupil-teacher relationship. However, it is not an easy task and success may be achieved only by dedication and direction.

The first step in this process was the definition of the goal - the goal being to humanize the pupil-teacher relationship. I defined this humanization as;

1) Children should enjoy school, want to attend school, and think it's a good place to be.

2) Students must be treated with respect and dignity as individuals.

These thoughts are not profound, yet there exist so many flagrant abuses in schools that they must be restated in order to insure awareness.

A statement and definition of goals does not automatically insure success in achieving an attitudinal change in the professional staff. Sensitivity training has not met with permanent improvement in teacher-child interaction. Since face-to-face dialogue as a method for change has not been successful, I determined that a change in conditions might encourage a change in the way teachers view their pupils. There were five conditions to implementing my plan.

1) Small-group instruction

2) Two-person team teaching

3) Carpeting in classrooms

4) Open space

5) Parent involvement

If the principal expects the teachers to be humanistic towards their students, he must be humanistic towards them. The leader of the school must understand the needs of the teachers as well as those of the student. He must be certain to exercise that leadership in a humanistic fashion.

My initial reaction to the discussion of this topic was "My God, what a bummer." No one is really interested in numanizing any more. The tide is moving out. During the 1969 Convention in this city, William Glasser was among the keynote speakers. His topic was "The Effect of School Failure on the Life of a Child". Charles Frankel's address was "Toward a Humanistic Revolution in Education". Samuel D. Proctor spoke on "The Black Contribution to the American Experience". Each of these speeches was printed in "The National Elementary Principal" in its humanizing the school publications and later reprinted in a special publication entitled "Humanizing Dehumanizing. The focus of attention leading up to and including that period was humanizing education, relevent education, team teaching, non-graded, individualization, British Primary School, etc. In 1970, Silberman published his book "Crisis in the Classroom", considered by many to be the Bible of the movement.

By contrast to this emphasis on the affective domain in education, we are witnessing the resurgence of cognitive education. Consider the title of this convention eight years later. Back to Basics--the word "Back" crossed out and the word "Forward" substituted. That word "forward" is bunk, in spite of what Dr. Clements said. If it walks like a duck and it talks like a duck then it is a duck. Just check the titles of the other speakers. Vincent Dodge - "Basics for Principals" and Maya Angelou, "Right On With the Three R's".

Current educational literature parallels these topics. The emphasis is clearly on basics and efficiency. Consider system analysis, time management, management by objectives, achievement scores, I.Q. tests. All of these are current topics.

As I mentioned earlier, the interest has waned. Humanizing is no longer in vogue. When I was considering this topic, I began to wonder about that. Why is it that when we discuss philosophy, it somehow becomes an either/or position? Why does the "Back to Basics" movement have to push aside humanistic education? I began to consider the notion that perhaps this topic was not a bummer, but rather a very appropriate topic because I don't believe that it has to be either/or. Silberman says, and I quote: "Schools can be humane and still educate well. They can be genuinely concerned with gaiety and joy and individual growth and fulfillment without sacrificing concern for intellectual discipline and development. They can be simultaneously child-centered and subject or knowledge centered. They can stress esthetic and moral education without weakening the three R's. They can do all these things if - but only if - their structure content and objectives are transformed". I accept Silberman's statement and for that reason I came to the conclusion that this topic is probably more relevant than ever.

A few years ago I tried to implement a number of Silberman's suggestions and the suggestions of other writers of innovative ideas. Some things work out well while others are disasterous. I tried to pattern my school after the British Primary School, employing individualization, interest centers, comfortable furniture, open space, etc. We developed a levels program enabling us to maintain continuous progress for the students as they moved through the grades. We weren't especially successful. It wasn't bad, but it didn't do what I had hoped. Independent learning didn't really thrive, and achievement scores didn't soar. As a matter of fact,

They didn't even stay the same, and students didn't appear to become creative. Reflecting over the situation, I found that

1) I wasn't as liberal as I'd thought

   a) I wanted students to express themselves, but I didn't want them too noisy;

   b) I wanted them to have freedom, but wanted the room to remain comparatively tidy;

   c) I wanted the teachers to meed individual needs and still improve achievement scores.

My emotional views acquired from years of schooling got all caught up in my intellectual views.

2) This ambivalence only added confusion to a staff which was already confused. They didn't want the change to begin with. They didn't understand it and they didn't believe in it.

3) To implement any major innovation requires a total commitment from everyone involved including teacher, principal, central office administration and Board of Education.

Most of the schools I visited, if they were successful at all, had this commitment. Staff was often hand-picked or they volunteered for the assignment. School population was small. They usually had an assistant principal and the pupil/teacher ratio was low.

My staff was not hand-picked, nor did they volunteer. Experience ranged from brand new teachers to those ready for retirement. Their motivation for attempting the new experience was me. My motivation came from the literature. When I read the descriptions of what the schools should be like, I was impressed. The writers are convincing, but then they're supposed to be convincing. If they weren't, they wouldn't get published. I soon discovered, however, that for principals like you and me, being convincing was not

enough. The writers are idea people. We have to implement and it's just not easy to do all that we would like to do. With this in mind, I took stock of the situation and decided that since I could not effect a total change in the school, I would attempt that which I wanted to do most. Keeping it simple - my goal is to humanize the pupil-teacher relationship. I define this humanization as

1) Children should enjoy school. By enjoy, I don't mean fun and frolic, although that's not necessarily bad, but enjoy - meaning just wanting to come to school and know that it's a good place;

2) To do that, the second part of this goal is that students are to be treated with respect and dignity as individuals.

"Do for others what you want them to do for you"--Christ (Matthew 7:12). "Treat your friends as you want them to treat you" -- Aristotle. "Do naught to others which, if done to thee, would cause thee pain" -- Hinduism (Mahabharata 5:15-17) "Do not to others what you do not want done to yourself" --Buddah (Dharma) "What is the meaning of Torah? What is hateful to thyself, do not do unto thy neighbor"-- Hillel the Elder "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do unto others". --Confucius (Analects 15:23) And finally, the "Categorical Imperative": "Act so as to treat humanity, both in thine own person and that of every other, always as an end and never merely as means" - - Kant (Grundelgung zur Metaphysic der Sitten). These statements - from different lands, different traditions and different epochs - sound a universal call for the ethical citizenship principles of all individuals.

I think all people believe in those statements. They may not always practice it, but they believe. However, I do feel there is at least one exception. Adults don't always apply these principles to children. And in schools, we are especially guilty of applying a double standard. Think about these things. Would you:

1) challenge a teacher in front of students?

2) not allow teachers a coffee break?

3) during a faculty meeting, respond to a question with "Can't you hear?" or "Pay attention and you'd know what was going on."?

4. at a faculty meeting, respond to a question with:

"Oh come on, a college freshman could answer that." ?

5) interrupt a teacher in class without excusing yourself or apologizing for the interruption? (You wouldn't, but teachers may interrupt students regardless of what they're involved in. "Johnny, come here.")

6) discuss teachers in detail with any willing ear? (It would violate professional ethics. But teachers do discuss students in this way.)

This double standard seems obvious. These, and so many other flagrant abuses must be eliminated if we are ever going to make the schools humane. Teachers must view each child as a special problem or a special individual if we are to treat him with respect. Don't misunderstand. By my statements, I'm not indicting teachers. That's not my purpose. I'm addressing myself to teachers only as a part of the total adult population. But teachers and schools are the part we are particularly interested in with this program. Most attempts to humanize teachers and to improve their ability to interact with children rested with the trend toward sensitivity training programs. The titles of these programs ranged from "T" Group, encounter group, "Human Potential Movement", "group relations training". Our district offered a transactional analysis in-service program for teachers. Another in-service course was called "Values Clarification". There was certainly no observeable change in teacher attitudes. There may have been some minor immediate adjustments, but I don't see any significan long term change. How can there be? Most of these courses are little more than attendance courses. I'm sure that half of the participants only take them for the credit. With the other half, we expect a lifetime of value development to be adjusted in ten 90 minute group sessions. Changing attitudes is the principal's most

difficult challenge. In our district, sensitivity training has not been successful and I've not ready any significant research that says it has.

Viewing humaneness from that view, I had to determine how then could I implement my goal. I decided that if I couldn't change the teachers directly, I had to set the conditions which forced them to change the way they viewed the students.

If they looked at their students differently, and if the conditions under which they worked were changed then perhaps they would alter their treatment of students. There were five conditions to this plan:

1) Small group instruction
2) Team teaching
3) Carpet installation
4) Open space
5) Parent involvement

Much of this sounds or will sound like a promotion for the British Primary School. However, I want you to bear in mind that the focus of these statements are only to improve the humannessof the pupil-teacher relationship in a very structured, skill-oriented tradition bound environment.

Small Group Instruction

Oddly enough, that's not a very difficult concept to sell. When you consider the range of abilities within a classroom, and teachers are certainly more aware of this factor than we are, it becomes difficult for them to defend large group skill instruction. When

you raise the question of boredom for the brighter students and frustration for the slower students and when you ask how they can serve the needs of their students with these varying abilities in one lesson, explanations are feeble. You know it and they know it. Pressing this point has forced the teachers to consider other alternatives. It's at this point that I re-emphasized some of the concepts of the open classroom. No longer pressing for individualization relevant to small group instruction seemed natural to them. I encouraged and they responded with less use of the chalkboard. Utilizing different parts of the room for instruction, encouraging contract teaching, I discouraged complete reliance on the textbook, eliminated spelling and penmanship books.

Teams

I have five two-person teams. As I mentioned, I tried some team teaching. Teaming can be very difficult. There may be conflicts of personality, conflicts of workload. Administration of the teams was difficult. Two-man teams seemed to eliminate these problems. Personality problems are eliminated since membership seems to evolve. The two members can work and share. It's more of a sharing relationship than a team relationship. However, it does provide the advantages of a team. Students do have another adult to relate to. They do have another person to solve their problems if their teacher is busy. They can receive individualized instruction from one teacher while the other is showing a film or providing larger group instruction. From the teacher's point of view, another adult to talk to or to share a relaxing moment with is healthy. Another person to share school related thoughts or problems can strengthen their relationship with the students. Difficult students are often

dealt with by the second member of the team rather than being sent out to the hall or to the office. This certainly results in more positive student relationships.

Carpets

Carpets are great. From the student's point of view, they have to rank as the greatest thing since bubble gum. Now if a child is reprimanded for being disruptive, it's because he/she has been noisy and not because he/she moved the desk or chair or dropped the pencil. The carpet creates an atmosphere for less irritations to the teacher. It's comfortable to walk on, student talking and student walking noise is muffled and the teacher can therefore tolerate more of it. To the student, it's more like home. They can relax, sit or do their work on the floor. With carpeting, this doesn't seem unnatural. It also provides the teacher with the opportunity to join the students in a comfortable position on the floor. Many of the younger teachers are more informal. Sitting on the floor with their students is comfortable for them. They enjoy it. It's natural for them. The appearance of the carpet provides a cozier homey atmosphere which generates a more humane interaction.

Open Space

The key word for open space is flexibility. It creates an opportunity for two-man teams. It provides the flexibility for teacher and student movement. It provides the flexibility for improved facility and program use.

Parents

Parent involvement is a key factor in humanizing the school. The

more parents you can get involved in the school, the more communication will exist. That communication will be informal and it is usually positive. Our school is open to parents for almost any purpose they choose. We've had few abuses. The more teachers and parents see each other the less they feel threatened and the more cooperation and understanding will develop between them. They will talk about education in general and individual students in particular. Sometimes it's informal, but formal or informal it is usually comfortable. Children see their parents in school and they are pleased and proud. When they see parents of friends working on projects or working with students, it's healthy. School genuinely becomes a cooperative parent-teacher effort. Some of the parent involvement is:

1) Right to Read Program
2) Cooking, etc.
3) Feeding the animals
4) Exercise group for parents
5) Erection of a Tirecraft Playground (120 parents/teachers/students worked in a hurricane watch.)
6) Outdoor education program-overnight. Every parent must attend orientation program. 50% participate.
7) U.S. Map done in patchwork quilting. Fifty different parents worked within the school to complete it. It decorates the library hallway.
8) Parents worked with students on macrame and stenciling.

In summary, I would mention the one single most important factor to the development of a humane school. You are the leader of your school. Everything has to start with you. If you want teachers to respect children, you have to respect children and live by it. That's not easy. When teachers send students to the office, they want you to

"lower the boom". If you listen to the child and say that he has a point of view, the teacher doesn't want to hear that. They're mad and that child's been bad and you (meaning me) have to do something about it. If you acknowledge that students (even seven year olds) have rights, and perhaps the teacher, by acting differently, could have avoided the situation, you're accused of being soft on kids. You give the teachers no support. I call parents for disruptive children, and I do suspend students (even eight year olds) but I won't arbitrarily punish, suspend or rebuke the child simply because the teacher has sent him/her to the office. If I think the teacher is right, I act, but if I think the child is getting an unfair shake, I'm just not going to compound it with additional punishment. Everyone likes to say "My door is always open.", including me. However, when talking of respect for individuals, your door has to be open to students as well as teachers and other adults. I encourage students to discuss complaints and problems with me and I try to act on them even if they appear minor. I don't get a whole lot of takers on the offer but that's not really important. The issue is not how many problems I see, but rather that the students feel they do have someone who will listen to them, someone they can trust. I take great pains in my dealings with students to develop that trust.

Secondly, if you want teachers to be flexible and humanistic, you have to be flexible and humanistic with them. You have to understand their needs and provide them with support. You must recognize their individual differences. If you have a philosophy you can't impose it on all of them to the same degree because they can't all do what you want. Herein lies the art of being a principal. How do you encourage, support and provide materials for

the teacher who wants to change, wants to innovate, wants to be creative, without alienating the staff member who can't or won't change. They're not getting any special encouragement, support or extra materials that the others are getting. You have to develop a feeling of trust among those teachers. They have to feel you think them worthwhile and productive even though they don't accept your philosophy. You have to believe in them and you have to convince them. If you can develop a mutual bond of faith and respect with all your staff members, you'll find even the most traditional teachers making some effective changes.